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### This is the author's manuscript

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1627019> since 2023-01-27T10:17:54Z

*Published version:*

DOI:10.1007/s10661-017-5824-7

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# Local versus landscape spatial influency on biodiversity: a case study across five European industrialized areas

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## Abstract

Land use change—mostly habitat loss and fragmentation—has been recognized as one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss worldwide. According to the habitat amount hypothesis, these phenomena are mostly driven by the habitat area effect. As a result, species richness is a function of both the extent of suitable habitats and their availability in the surrounding landscape, irrespective of the dimension and isolation of patches of suitable habitat. In this context, we tested how the extent of natural areas, selected as proxies of suitable habitats for biodiversity, influences species richness in highly anthropogenic landscapes. We defined five circular sampling areas of 5 km radius, including both natural reserves and anthropogenic land-uses, centred in five major industrial sites in France, Italy and Germany. We monitored different biodiversity indicators for both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, including breeding birds, diurnal butterflies, grassland vegetation, odonata, amphibians, aquatic plants and benthic diatoms. We studied the response of the different indicators to the extent of natural land uses in the sampling area (local effect) and in the surrounding landscape (landscape effect), identified as a peripheral ring encircling the sampling area. Results showed a positive response of 5 out of 7 biodiversity indicators, with aquatic plants and odonata responding positively to the local effect, while birds, vegetation and diatoms showed a positive response to the landscape effect. Diatoms also showed a significant combined response to both effects. We conclude that surrounding landscapes act as important biodiversity sources, increasing the local biodiversity in highly anthropogenic contexts.

**Keywords:** habitat amount hypothesis, biodiversity indicators, land use, species richness

## 31    **Introduction**

32

33    Land use change has been recognized as one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss worldwide (Sala et al.  
34    2000; MEA 2005), causing species loss and biotic homogenization (Hendrickx et al. 2007; Billeter et al.  
35    2008; McKinney 2008; Johnson et al. 2013; Tudesque et al. 2014; Turrini and Knop 2015; Knop 2016). In  
36    particular, the conversion of natural areas into agricultural lands, the intensification of agricultural practices  
37    and the increase of urban areas are among the most frequent land use changes (Kleijn et al. 2006; Kleijn et  
38    al. 2009; Parris 2016). This process also affects freshwater ecosystems since humans live disproportionately  
39    near waterways (Sala et al. 2000), consequently altering water quality because of increased nutrient input and  
40    chemicals run-off (Foley et al. 2005).

41    Anthropogenic landscape alteration negatively influences biodiversity through habitat loss—reduction in the  
42    proportion of a landscape composed of suitable habitat for focal species—and habitat fragmentation—  
43    changes in the arrangement or configuration of the remaining habitat (Chhabra et al. 2006; Vitousek et al.  
44    2008; Smith et al. 2009; Hooke et al. 2012). However, because habitat loss and fragmentation are highly  
45    correlated, it is difficult to disentangle the contribution of each process to biodiversity loss (Smith et al.  
46    2009). This constraint is overcome in the context of the “habitat amount hypothesis”, which considers these  
47    phenomena to be driven by a single underlying process, the habitat area effect (Fahrig 2013). According to  
48    this hypothesis, species richness is a function of both the extent and the availability of suitable habitats in the  
49    surrounding landscape, irrespective of the dimension and the isolation of patches of suitable habitat. The  
50    effects of land use change on biodiversity can thus be measured by focusing on the amount of suitable  
51    habitats. In consequence of that, the preservation of natural land use areas, even in small isolated patches,  
52    may be considered a key management aspect for the preservation of biodiversity in human-dominated  
53    landscapes.

54    In the present paper, we aim at the identification of general patterns of species richness across different taxa,  
55    both terrestrial and aquatic, in order to investigate the habitat amount hypothesis in human-dominated  
56    landscapes. We here considered areas with high ‘naturalness’, i.e. internal characteristics of low local  
57    intensity of human disturbance (Kappes et al. 2011), as proxies of suitable habitats in five anthropogenic  
58    landscapes across Europe, characterized by the co-occurrence of natural reserves and industrial complexes.  
59    In particular, we tested how the extent of natural land use areas in anthropogenic landscapes influences  
60    biodiversity measured in terms of species richness of multiple taxa from both terrestrial and aquatic  
61    ecosystems. We considered i) the influence of the extent of natural land use on the local biodiversity within a  
62    5 km radius circular sampling area (*local effects*) and whether ii) the local biodiversity was influenced by the  
63    extent of natural land use occurring in the surrounding landscape defined as a ring buffering the sampling  
64    area (*landscape effects*).

65

## 66 **Materials and methods**

67

### 68 Sampling design

69

70 This work was developed in collaboration with FCA Group and CNH Industrial, in the framework of the  
71 Biodiversity Value Index project (BVI), aiming at evaluating the state of biodiversity in five industrial sites  
72 in Europe (Fig. 1). We selected five industrial areas (hereinafter study sites), constituted by the aggregation  
73 of several industrial buildings: FPT Powertrain Verrone, Magneti Marelli Venaria and IVECO Suzzara in  
74 Italy, FPT Industrial Bourbon-Lancy in France and IVECO Magirus Ulm in Germany (Tab. 1). All industrial  
75 complexes were located in the nearby (<5 km) of natural reserves within the same biogeographic area  
76 (continental), i.e. areas protected according to the national legislation — National Natural Reserves — or to  
77 the European Natura 2000 Network — Sites of Community Importance and Special Areas of Conservation.

78 For each study site, we defined a circular sampling area of 5 km radius, centred in the industrial complex.  
79 We chose to work in an area buffering the main source of disturbance in accordance with the guidelines for  
80 the environmental implication assessment provided for Natura 2000 Network sites (European Commission  
81 Environment 2002). The surface occupied by industrial complexes was always inferior to 4% of the total  
82 area. However, other types of anthropogenic land uses were present, i.e. urban and agricultural.

83 We obtained land cover data from the Corine Land Cover 2006 project (European Environmental Agency  
84 2006, <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/COR0-landcover>). We used Quantum Gis Desktop (Quantum  
85 Gis Development Team 2015, software version 2.10.1) to calculate the percentage of coverage of each land  
86 use type inside the sampling areas by taking the following steps: i) drawing of the sampling area of 5 km  
87 radius around each industrial complex; ii) overlap of the sampling area with the Corine Land Cover data and  
88 intersection; iii) calculation of the percentage of each land use.

89 We differentiated Corine data in artificial land use (urban and industrial), intensive agriculture, extensive  
90 agriculture and natural land use (forested classes, wetlands and water bodies). For each land use category, we  
91 extrapolated the areas and summed together to obtain a measure of their extent. We focused on natural land  
92 use and we expressed the surface data in percentages. The same land use measure was extrapolated for the  
93 surrounding landscape identified as a ring of 2.071 km of semi-radius extending around each sampling area.  
94 The 2.071 km semi-radius was chosen in order to obtain a surrounding landscape covering the same surface  
95 of the sampling area. It is important to notice that the extent of natural land use does not necessarily  
96 correspond to the extent of protected reserves, since anthropogenic land uses may be included in protected  
97 areas (Fig. 1).

98 Inside the sampling area (i.e. the 5 km radius circle), we considered both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.  
99 For terrestrial ecosystems, we focused on open field habitats, while for aquatic ecosystems we considered  
100 both lentic and lotic habitats. For each habitat, 10 sampling plots located inside the protected reserves  
101 included in the sampling area were randomly selected. We chose seven taxonomic groups that proved to be  
102 valuable biodiversity indicators according to literature. These are breeding birds, diurnal butterflies and  
103 grassland vegetation for open field habitats (Overmars et al. 2014; Manning et al. 2015; Van Swaay et al.  
104 2015), odonata, amphibians and aquatic plants for lentic habitats, i.e. ponds (Oertli et al. 2005; Angélibert et  
105 al. 2010; Menetrey et al. 2011), and benthic diatoms for the lotic habitats, i.e. rivers, streams and channels  
106 (Falasco & Bona 2011; Falasco et al. 2012).

107

108 Data collection

109

110 All biodiversity indicators were identified at the species level and sampled in accordance with standard  
111 protocols as follows.

112 *Breeding birds*

113 For the evaluation of the bird community, point counts were performed in accordance with Bibby et al.  
114 (2000). In each sampling plot, the operator listened to songbirds and looked for individuals for 10 minutes  
115 within a 100 m<sup>2</sup> area. All individuals surveyed or heard were identified and counted. Surveys started few  
116 minutes after dawn and ended before 10 AM. Surveys in rainy or windy days were avoided. Bird surveys  
117 were conducted during late spring and repeated in early summer, in order to assure that only breeding birds  
118 were recorded (Tab. 2).

119 *Diurnal butterflies*

120 We sampled diurnal butterflies along linear transects with a semi-quantitative method: a straight 100 m path  
121 was covered at a constant speed, while counting butterflies in an area of 5 m in height and 2.5 m to the right  
122 and to the left of the operator (Pollard and Yates, 1993; van Swaay et al. 2012). Surveys were performed  
123 during the warmest hours of the day (late morning - early afternoon), when the butterflies are most active,  
124 avoiding the collection of data on days with bad weather (strong wind or heavy rain). Surveys were repeated  
125 at least three times over the warm season (Tab. 2). Individuals were captured and subsequently released after  
126 their identification by means of field characters. When a butterfly could not be identified in the field,  
127 specimens were collected and subsequently identified in the laboratory.

128 *Grassland vegetation*

129 Grassland vegetation was investigated with the method of Braun-Blanquet (1964). For each sampling plot,  
130 we defined a 50x50 m square in a homogeneous area, avoiding ecotones in order to have standardized  
131 surveys in all sites. The presence of all species inside the square was recorded in order to get a  
132 comprehensive list. Surveys were repeated at least three times over the vegetative season (Tab. 2). Species  
133 were identified according to Tutin et al. (2001) and Pignatti (1982).

#### 134 *Odonata*

135 Odonata were sampled by visual census, in accordance with Bouwman et al. (2009). The presence of adult  
136 specimen was detected along transects on the perimeter of the ponds. Zygopteran and *Sympetrum* species  
137 were counted respectively within 2 m from the shore and 3 m from the water; the other species were  
138 considered within 5 m from the water. Surveys lasted half an hour and were performed during the warmest  
139 hours of the day (late morning - early afternoon) when Odonata are most active, avoiding the collection of  
140 data on days with bad weather (strong wind or heavy rain). Flying individuals were identified *in situ*. In each  
141 plot, two surveys were performed — a spring session and a summer session (Tab. 2) — in accordance with  
142 Angélibert et al. (2010).

#### 143 *Amphibians*

144 The field protocol followed the method by Schmidt (2005). Surveys lasted one hour each and were repeated  
145 at least twice over the reproductive season (Tab. 2), under standardized weather conditions, i.e. mild  
146 temperatures, with no wind or rain. Surveys after long periods of drought were avoided. Amphibians —  
147 adults, subadults, larvae — were surveyed by means of (i) visual census, (ii) identification of calls, and (iii)  
148 dip netting. The two species *Rana esculenta* and *Rana lessonae* were considered as one single taxon (green  
149 frog complex).

#### 150 *Aquatic plants*

151 We sampled aquatic plants according to the European standard protocol UNI EN 15460:2007. For each  
152 sampling plot we defined a sampling transect on the shore along which we compiled an exhaustive list.  
153 Surveys were repeated twice during the vegetative season (Tab. 2).

#### 154 *Diatoms*

155 We sampled benthic diatoms following the standard procedure (European Committee for Standardization,  
156 2003; UNI EN 14407:2004) and we performed one sampling session in spring (Tab. 2). Diatom  
157 identification was based on several diatom floras and monographies, as well as on recent taxonomic papers  
158 (Krammer and Lange-Bertalot 1986-1991a, b; Krammer 1997a, b; Reichardt 1999; Lange-Bertalot 2001;  
159 Krammer 2002, 2003; Blanco et al. 2010; Hofmann et al. 2011; Bey and Ector 2013; Falasco and Bona,  
160 2013; Falasco et al. 2013; Ector et al. 2015).

161

162 Statistical analysis

163

164 We firstly explored species richness data in accordance with Zuur et al. (2009, 2010). We used Cleveland  
165 dotplots and boxplots to assess the presence of extreme values and avoid unusual observations to exert an  
166 undue influence on estimated parameters. We evaluated multicollinearity among predictors, namely  
167 percentage of surface covered by natural land use in the sampling areas and surrounding landscapes, using  
168 Pearson correlation test and variance inflation factors (VIFs) (Zuur et al. 2009). Given their low correlation  
169 ( $r = 0.10$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ) we include all predictors in the same model.

170 The contribution of the local and landscape effects to biodiversity was tested by means of generalized linear  
171 mixed models (GLMMs). Percentage of natural land use in the sampling areas (*local effect*), in the  
172 surrounding landscapes (*landscape effect*) and their interaction were used as fixed factors, which were  
173 standardized in order to achieve homogenization of their distribution. Given the spatial dependence of the  
174 data — 10 sampling plots for each sampling site —, we applied the mixed procedure to include the grouping  
175 variable “Site” as a random factor in order to account for the variation it introduced in our samples, rather  
176 than to test for its direct effect on the dependent variables. Models were fitted with a Poisson error  
177 distribution (link function: log) which is able to deal with count data as recommended in Zuur et al. (2009).  
178 Models were tested for over-dispersion and were validated by constructing standard validation plots using  
179 the model residuals (Zuur et al. 2009). Statistical models were performed with the package *lme4* (Bates et al.  
180 2014) in R environment (R Core Team 2015).

181

## 182 **Results**

183

184 During the surveys, an amount of 190 sampling plots was visited and 340 biological samples were collected.  
185 Altogether, we identified 928 species (see ESM\_1 for the list of all recorded species). The five study sites  
186 showed different values in terms of land use coverage (Fig. 2) as well as of species richness for each  
187 biodiversity indicator (Tab. 3). Considering land use, Suzzara (Italy) showed the highest coverage of  
188 intensive agriculture, while Ulm (Germany) presented the highest level of industrialization and urbanization.  
189 Bourbon-Lancy (France) and Verrone (Italy) showed the highest coverage of extensive agriculture and  
190 natural land use respectively.

191 The response to the extent of natural land use in the sampling areas (*local effect*) and in the surrounding  
192 landscape (*landscape effect*) differed consistently among biodiversity indicators (Tab. 4).

193 Diurnal butterflies and amphibians did not show any significant response. Species richness of odonata and  
194 aquatic plants was positively influenced by the local effect, while grassland vegetation and breeding birds  
195 showed a positive response to the landscape effect (Figs. 3 and 4).

196 Diatoms showed a more complex combined response since they were significantly influenced by the  
197 landscape effect but also by the interaction of local and landscape effects. In particular, when setting the  
198 extent of natural land use in the sampling area at low values, the response to the landscape effect was  
199 positive. On the other hand, this response was negative when the extent of natural land use in the sampling  
200 area reached high values (Fig. 5).

201

## 202 **Discussion and conclusions**

203

204 In this work, we showed how biodiversity indicators responded to the extent of natural land use locally and  
205 at the landscape level. Aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems were simultaneously analysed at similar spatial  
206 scales with a standardized statistical approach in order to shed light on similarities and differences in the  
207 response to the land use (Siqueira et al. 2015). In particular, we highlighted a common trend across the  
208 different taxonomic groups, since natural land use affected positively species richness in five out of seven  
209 biodiversity indicators, both at the local and the landscape level.

210 When focusing on *local effects* (i.e. on the response of biodiversity to the extent of natural areas occurring in  
211 a 5 km radius circle areas), we detected a positive influence for aquatic plants and odonata. These results  
212 may suggest the positive role played by natural land use at the local scale for maintaining species diversity in  
213 human-altered landscapes. Such positive response of aquatic plants is in accordance with Bolpagni and Piotti  
214 (2015), who detected high species diversity of aquatic plants in natural lentic habitats. The similar positive  
215 response of odonata species richness possibly indicates an indirect relationship with aquatic plants. Indeed,  
216 odonata are influenced by the structure of the shoreline vegetation (Buchwald, 1992), which is necessarily  
217 more complex and species-rich where ponds are surrounded by natural land use, as suggested by Declerck et  
218 al. (2006). More generally, aquatic vegetation is crucial for many aspects of the ecology of the odonata,  
219 including habitat heterogeneity required by the larval stages (e.g., protection from predators), emergence  
220 supports during metamorphosis, as well as important substrates for oviposition and perching for adult  
221 odonata (Corbet and Brooks 2008; Honkanen et al. 2011).

222 When considering *landscape effects* (i.e the response of biodiversity to the extent of natural areas  
223 surrounding the 5 km radius circle area), we detected a positive response of the local assemblages of  
224 breeding birds and grassland vegetation. These results suggest how surrounding natural areas represent  
225 important key factors for preserving biodiversity, especially of terrestrial organisms. These results are in



226 accordance with literature, where a positive effect of surrounding natural land use has been reported for both  
227 birds and grassland vegetation (Wright & Wimberly 2013; Winsa et al. 2015). This positive effect might be  
228 due to the possible increase of source of colonists and connectivity. Furthermore, a negative relationship  
229 between isolation and bird diversity has been reported, especially for agricultural landscapes (Bailey et al.  
230 2010). This might also have indirect repercussions on vegetation since higher landscape connectivity could  
231 guarantee a higher bird-mediated seed dispersal (Herrmann et al. 2016).

232 A response to the *landscape effect* was also observed for diatoms, which also showed a significant response  
233 to the interaction between the local and the landscape effect, i.e. landscape effect became significantly major  
234 when the extent of natural land use in the sampling area was low. Given that diatom communities are  
235 strongly shaped by water quality (van Dam et al. 1994; Rott et al. 1999; Delgado et al. 2012), we interpreted  
236 this result as an indirect top-down cascade effect, which relates land cover to diatoms through the indirect  
237 influence of water quality (Tudesque et al. 2014). Indeed, anthropogenic land uses in the surrounding  
238 environment may cause nutrients increase in waterbodies, consequently favouring tolerant species and  
239 possibly increasing diatom diversity (Blanco et al. 2012). This may explain the negative effect of this  
240 interaction, since high naturalness leads towards oligotrophic aquatic environments, which could result in  
241 low species richness of diatoms.

242 A second reason could be that riverine biodiversity indicators integrate the response of the entire upstream  
243 area (Tudesque et al. 2014). For these reasons, despite diatoms are widely recognised as effective indicators  
244 for measuring water quality (Álvarez-Blanco et al. 2012; Delgado et al. 2012), according to our results  
245 diatom species richness proved not to be a reliable metric for detecting the effect of land use on biodiversity  
246 in anthropogenic landscapes, in accordance with Blanco et al. (2012).

247 Surprisingly, diurnal butterflies and amphibians did not show any significant effect to the extent of natural  
248 land use both in the sampling areas and in the surrounding landscapes. Concerning amphibians, similar  
249 results were obtained in Menetrey et al. (2011), who excluded species richness of amphibians from a  
250 multimetric index aimed at the evaluation of pond integrity, since this parameter did not discriminate  
251 between different environmental conditions. For diurnal butterflies, Collinge et al. (2003) revealed little  
252 influence of landscape composition on butterfly communities. A further issue might be that in our sample  
253 amphibians and diurnal butterflies showed the lowest variation in species richness among plots.  
254 Consequently, the detected pattern that amphibian and diurnal butterfly species richness are not affected by  
255 natural land use must be considered cautiously.

256 In conclusion, our results are in agreement with the habitat amount hypothesis, which also apply to  
257 industrialized and highly anthropogenic contexts.

258

259

260 **Acknowledgements**

261

262 We are grateful FCA and CNH Industrial who involved us in this project and for financing and supporting  
263 this research and to Studio Fieschi which collaborated with us on this project. We would like to thank all the  
264 staff of all industrial sites for their hospitality and for kindly authorizing our research activities and joining us  
265 in the fieldwork. We also thank Barbara Rizzioli, Nestor Viñals, Lorenzo Boggia, Dario Masante, Giacomo  
266 Assandri, Alberto Doretto, Sabrina Mossino and Davide Giuliano who helped us in collecting data, and  
267 Stefano Mammola and Frederik Hendrickx for their suggestions concerning statistical analysis.

268

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476 **Figure captions**

477 **Fig. 1** Map representing the location of the five industrial sites and a detailed view of their land use in the  
478 sampling area (internal circle, continuous line) and the surrounding landscape (external circle, dashed line). a  
479 = Bourbon-Lancy; b = Venaria; c = Verrone; d = Suzzara; e = Ulm

480 **Fig. 2** Percentage of land use coverage calculated for the sampling areas (a) and surrounding landscapes (b).  
481 Artificial = percentage of urban and industrial land uses; Intensive = percentage of intensive agriculture;  
482 Extensive = percentage of extensive agriculture; Natural = percentage of natural land use

483 **Fig. 3** Predicted values (blue continuous line) and confidence intervals (95%, light grey area) for (a) aquatic  
484 plants and (b) odonata against the extent of natural land use in the sampling area (*local effect*)

485 **Fig. 4** Predicted values (blue continuous line) and confidence intervals (95%, light grey area) for (a)  
486 breeding birds, (b) grassland vegetation and (c) diatoms against the extent of natural land use in the  
487 surrounding landscape (*landscape effect*)

488 **Fig. 5** Predicted species richness of diatoms and the interaction between the extent of natural land use in the  
489 sampling areas and surrounding landscapes. Lines represent the *landscape effect* at low (0%, continuous  
490 line), intermediate (15%, dashed line) or high (30%, dotted line) cover of natural land use in the sampling  
491 area. Major landscape effects are seen at low extent of natural land use in the sampling area, conversely they  
492 become negligible at higher extents of natural land use in the sampling area